

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 CCO-00 CIAE-00 OTPE-00 EB-04

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3667

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PLAB, FR

SUBJECT: PTT STRIKE

1. SUMMARY. IN FIRST REAL TEST FOR GISCARD'S ADMINIS-
TRATION IN LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS, ELEVEN-DAY
PTT STRIKE CONTINUES AND GOF - UNION NEGOTIATIONS
REMAIN SUSPENDED BECAUSE OF UNION REJECTION OF GOF
CONCESSIONS AS INADEQUATE. PTT HAS BEEN IN DIFFICULTY
FOR SOME TIME BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE STAFFING AND UNION
FEARS OF PTT BEING BROKEN UP WITH PARTS HANDED TO
PRIVATE ENTERPRISE. REAL CHALLENGE FOR GOF IS WHETHER
IT CAN NEGOTIATE A PTT SETTLEMENT WITHOUT OPENING UP
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QUESTION OF SALARIES FOR ENTIRE PUBLIC SERVICE. TIME

IS RUNNING SHORT. END SUMMARY.

2. THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF AN EARLY END TO FRENCH POSTAL STRIKE -- NOW IN ITS ELEVENTH DAY -- WHICH HAS CRIPPLED MAIL SERVICE AND SERIOUSLY AFFECTED SAVINGS AND CHECKING ACCOUNTS. SEVERAL NEGOTIATING SESSIONS BETWEEN UNIONS (CGT-FO-CFDT) AND PTT SECRETARY OF STATE LELONG PRODUCED SOME GOF CONCESSIONS BUT UNIONS REJECTED THEM AS TOTALLY INADEQUATE. WHILE LELONG PROCLAIMS THAT NEGOTIATIONS HAVE NOT BEEN BROKEN, THERE HAS BEEN NO NEW DATE SET FOR A MEETING WITH UNIONS. MEANWHILE UNIONS AND ESPECIALLY FO ARE APPEALING TO PRIME MINISTER TO INTERVENE BUT HE HAS NOT RESPONDED YET.

3. OBVIOUS ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PTT STRIKE IS PERCEIVED DIFFERENTLY BY GENERAL PUBLIC DEPENDING ON WHETHER BILLS OR ORDERS AND CHECKS ARE HELD UP BY NON-DELIVERY. THIS EXPLAINS IN PART THE SOMEWHAT PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDE TAKEN SO FAR BY FRENCH PUBLIC. ONLY EXCEPTION ARE EMPLOYEES WHO RECEIVE THEIR PAYCHECKS (OR RETIREMENT PAY) THROUGH THE PTT. GOF HOWEVER IS TAKING MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE THIS CONSEQUENCE. IT IS RECALLED IN THIS CONNECTION THAT BANK EMPLOYEES' MONTH LONG STRIKE IN MARCH-APRIL 1974 WHICH AT THE TIME WAS DESCRIBED AS "CATASTROPHIC" IS NOT JUDGED IN RETROSPECT TO HAVE CAUSED IRREPARABLE DAMAGE.

4. STRIKE WHICH STARTED AS A WILDCAT MOVE IN REACTION TO INEPT HANDLING OF A PTT EMPLOYEES' PETITION BY DIRECTOR OF A MAIL SORTING STATION IN PARIS REFLECTS FOLLOWING CONDITIONS IN PTT WHICH LED EDITORIALISTS TO WRITE FROM TIME TO TIME THAT THE "FRENCH PTT IS SICK":

A. RECRUITMENT OF LARGE NUMBERS OF YOUNG WORKERS ACCEPTING MENIAL PTT JOBS NOT AS BEGINNING OF CAREERS BUT AS EXPEDIENT UNTIL BETTER JOBS CAN BE FOUND. AS A RESULT NEW RECRUITS ARE GENERALLY OVERQUALIFIED FOR THEIR JOBS WHILE BY COMPARISON THEIR SUPERIORS APPEAR TO BE UNDERQUALIFIED FOR THEIR SUPERVISORY POSITIONS. HENCE DOUBLE CAUSE FOR CHRONIC MALAISE AND UNIONS PRESSURE FOR GREATER PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNGER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WORKERS.

B. ONE OUT OF FOUR PTT EMPLOYEES ARE "TEMPORARY" (AUXILIAIRES) I.E. DO NOT HAVE PERMANENT CIVIL SERVICE STATUS, ARE PAID MINIMUM WAGES AND ARE GENERALLY LESS SENSITIVE THAN THEIR REGULAR COLLEAGUES TO FRENCH PTT TRADITION FOR GOOD SERVICE. HENCE THE UNIONS INSISTENCE ON REDUCING THROUGH CONVERSIONS PRESENT NUMBER OF "AUXILIAIRES" I.E., 90,000 OUT OF 380,000 TOTAL PTT

EMPLOYMENT.

C. WELL KNOWN EXISTENCE OF POOR WORK CONDITIONS (ESPECIALLY IN SORTING STATIONS) BECAUSE OF UNDERSTAFFING AND TRANSITIONAL ENVIRONMENT WHILE GREATER MECHANIZATION IS BEING INTRODUCED.

D. UNION AS WELL AS RANK AND FILE OBSESSION WITH SUSPICION (FAIRLY JUSTIFIED AT TIMES) THAT GOF IS SEEKING OPPORTUNE TIME AND MEANS TO BREAK UP PTT ESTABLISHMENT AND EVEN HAND SOME OF THE PIECES TO PRIVATE ENTERPRISE. AS SEEN THROUGH THIS OBSESSIVE FEAR SUCH FACTORS AS UNDERSTAFFING CAUSING DROP IN

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QUALITY OF SERVICE, LOW SALARIES AND LARGE PERCENTAGE OF "TEMPORARY" WORKERS ARE GOING TO MAKE PTT RIPE FOR DISMEMBERMENT (DEMANTELEMENT).

E. EXPLOITATION OF FOREGOING BY EXTREMIST GROUPS MOSTLY TROTSKYITE WHICH HAVE SUCCEEDED IN INFILTRATING PTT BY ORGANIZING LOCAL UNIONS AFFILIATED WITH FO.

5. SUCCESSIVE PTT MINISTERS CONSISTENTLY UNDERESTIMATED STATE OF MIND INSPIRED BY FOREGOING CONDITIONS IN PTT ORGANIZATION OR HAVE RELIED ON ACCELERATED MECHANIZATION TO SOLVE THE PERSONNEL PROBLEMS. THIS HAD THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OPPOSITE EFFECT SINCE IT ADDED FEAR OF LOSS OF JOBS TO SORTING AND OTHER MACHINES.

6. AS UNIONS AND OBSERVERS ARE TRYING TO CRYSTALBALL THE EVOLUTION OF THE STRIKE ONE REALIZES THAT THIS IS FIRST TEST GISCARD'S ADMINISTRATION MUST FACE IN AREA OF LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN PUBLIC SECTOR WHICH TRADITIONALLY CAN BE EXPECTED TO BE MORE VOLATILE IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY THAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR BECAUSE OF THE PROTECTION AFFORDED BY CIVIL SERVICE STATUS. THE DIFFICULT QUESTION FOR GOF IS WHETHER AT THIS POINT IT IS STILL POSSIBLE TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT WHICH WILL BE LIMITED TO PTT EMPLOYEES AND WOULD NOT CREATE A PRECEDENT FOR ENTIRE PUBLIC SERVICE. WE FEEL THAT THIS IS STILL FEASIBLE BUT TIME IS RUNNING SHORT.
STONE

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